

THE SAN GERONIMO SWIFT IN HONDURAS

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THE beautiful, but little known, San Gerónimo Swift (*Panyptila sancti-hieronymi*) has long been considered to have a very restricted range. Partly because it has been difficult to collect, it has been poorly represented in collections both in this country and abroad. In the British Museum are the type pair, taken in 1862, and a third specimen, obtained in 1888 and labelled "Guatemala. J. Rodriguez. B. M. Reg. No. 1888. 7. 30. 75." Two specimens mentioned by Ridgway (1911. *Bull. U. S. Natl. Mus.*, 50: 592) are in the collection of the U. S. National Museum. They were taken at the type locality, San Gerónimo, Vera Paz, Guatemala, by Henry Hague, in 1867. Salvin and Godman (1893. *Biologia Centrali-Americana. Aves*, 2: 372) discuss a sixth specimen, a bird taken near Antigua, Guatemala, by Don Vicente Constancia. This specimen, which was deposited in the Museum of the Sociedad Económica de Guatemala, was destroyed in the earthquake which wrecked Guatemala City in 1925. For a long time the species thus was known from a total of six specimens and from a very few published accounts of birds seen. Notable among the sight records were those of A. W. Anthony, whose manuscript comments were quoted in full by Griscom (1932. "Bird-Life in Guatemala." *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 64: 193). Anthony saw flocks of the swifts repeatedly in May on the eastern slopes of Volcán de Agua, near Antigua, Guatemala. In the absence of specimens or records from elsewhere the range of *Panyptila sancti-hieronymi* has been believed to be restricted to the "mountains of western Guatemala" (cf. Peters, Check-List of Birds of the World, 4: 253). Griscom, in a recent letter to J. Van Tyne, stated that he and W. DeWitt Miller were sure they had seen the species in the mountains of north-central Nicaragua in April, 1917. They did not, however, obtain a specimen.

In the light of the paucity of definite information concerning this swift, a collection of them made recently at the Escuela Agrícola Panamericana in the republic of Honduras, Central America, is of interest if for no other reason than that it extends the known range considerably to the southward and eastward of western Guatemala. The Escuela Agrícola Panamericana is in the Yeguaré River valley, in the Department of Francisco Morazán, in the mountainous south-central part of Honduras. Its altitude is 2600 feet. Field observations on the birds thereabouts were made by Carr over a period of four years. For a detailed description of the area see "Outline for a Classification of Animal Habitats in Honduras," by A. F. Carr, Jr. (1950. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 94: 580-585).

The large, graceful *Panyptila* was to be seen nearly any evening during the

year circling at altitudes of 4500 to 5000 feet above the mountain sides surrounding the valley. Another swift, the much smaller *Chaetura vauxi richmondi*, was observed and collected in the cloud forest capping a peak in the vicinity by Dickinson (1951. *Wilson Bulletin*, 63: 201-202). In the valley proper, *Panyptila* appeared only after the first heavy showers of the rainy season. Its descent to this lower altitude appeared to be in response to the emergence of enormous swarms of termites following the rains. At such times large numbers of San Gerónimo Swifts, in company with at least two other swifts, the Chestnut-collared (*Chaetura rutila brunneitorques*) and the Black (*Nephoecetes niger costaricensis*), as well as Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and Violet-green Swallows (*Tachycineta thalassina*), often gathered in the valley to forage above the pastures and among the palms and buildings of the school grounds. Even at this low altitude their wariness and swift, erratic flight made collection difficult. From June 16 to July 4, 1948, we took six specimens. These have been

TABLE 1
MEASUREMENTS OF HONDURAS SPECIMENS OF *Panyptila sancti-hieronymi*

Collection*	Sex	Age	Wing	Tail	Exposed Culmen	Tarsus	Toe	Locality
UMMZ	♂	Juv.	187.0	86.5	7.0	14.5	8.0	Yeguaré River
MCZ	♂	Ad.	178.5	85.7	7.5	14.0	8.1	Yeguaré River
DBUF	♂	Ad.	181.0	89.0	7.0	13.7	8.1	Yeguaré River
UMMZ	♀	Ad.	180.0	84.5	7.6	13.5	8.2	Yeguaré River
MCZ	?	Ad.	184.0	88.5	7.7	13.9	8.0	Yeguaré River
DBUF	♀	Ad.	187.0	87.5	7.5	14.0	8.0	Yeguaré River
DBUF	?	Juv.	171.5	84.0	7.1	13.1	8.0	Cerro del Chile
DBUF	?	Juv.	181.0	85.6	7.2	13.5	8.4	Cerro del Chile
DBUF	?	Juv.	183.0	88.0	7.0	13.5	7.9	Cerro del Chile

* Abbreviations used are as follows: UMMZ, Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan; DBUF, Department of Biology, University of Florida; MCZ, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.

carefully compared with specimens of the much smaller *Panyptila cayennensis*. Among the stomach contents of two specimens were the remains of large numbers of the winged form of an unidentified termite and a single adult female of the pentatomid bug *Solubea pugnax*.

We have every reason to believe that the San Gerónimo Swift breeds in the Yeguaré valley. On several occasions late in the afternoon, observers saw swifts flying into an abandoned mine shaft in the precipitous scarp on the east face of Cerro Uyuca at an altitude of about 2600 feet. All attempts to reach this spot were unsuccessful. Although there were numerous such shafts at similar altitudes around the valley, this appeared to be the only one inhabited by *Panyptila*. Perhaps this was because all the other shafts were near settled areas.

We offer the following tangible proof that *Panyptila sancti-hieronymi* breeds in Honduras. On June 22, 1949, Sr. Juan Landaverde, a prospector and able woodsman from a valley some twenty miles east of the Escuela, brought to Carr three living young swifts. They were well feathered, but as yet unable to fly. They had been found by Landaverde in an old mine shaft on Cerro del Chile, Department of El Paraíso, at an altitude of about 4800 feet. Landaverde described the opening of this shaft as easily accessible. Worth noting, however, is the fact that the Chile area is wild and sparsely inhabited. The young swifts were not timid. For several days they clung to and crawled about the sides of a tall straw basket, feeding readily on yolks of eggs and mashed ripe bananas. When the basket was touched, all three usually uttered high chittering squeaks, very similar to the call of the adults, and climbed upward with mouths open and wings vibrating.

We are indebted to Dr. Pierce Brodkorb for his tentative identification of the ornithological material upon which this report is based. Dr. J. Van Tyne kindly compared our *Panyptila sancti-hieronymi* specimens with those available in the U. S. National Museum, commenting as follows: "They seem to be identical. The old skins, of course, show their age in a yellowing of the white feathers and a browning of the black ones. I noted no other differences." Dr. Van Tyne also assisted in checking collections here and abroad for additional specimens. Mr. Jon Herring furnished the identification of the insect material. Skins in the Dickinson collection have been deposited in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University and the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology.

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